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ABSTRACT

The state of the art in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) is characterized by diversity in philosophies, activities, and materials. It has been summarized in a variety of reports. The perspectives developed here are a supplement to the other reports rather than a summary. Aspects of the state of the art are examined through sets of categories gleaned from the literature on second language teaching in order to provide perspectives on TESOL today. The categories discussed are the following: (1) approach, method, and technique; (2) learner-centered and teacher-centered activities in the language classroom; (3) skill-getting and skill-using activities; (4) the distinction between mechanical, meaningful, and communicative activities; (5) the concepts of real and realistic use of language; (6) the distinction between language use in teaching settings and language use in non-teaching settings; (7) application to lessons of the categories of usability, organization, responsiveness, responsibility, and pluralism; (8) the distinction between formal and informal linguistic environments; and (9) the distinction between linguistic competence and communicative competence. (AMH)

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PERSPECTIVES ON TESOL

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INTRODUCTION

At the outset, before discussing perspectives on the state of the art in TESOL, let me suggest some perspectives on my comments in this paper. One is faced with a challenging task indeed when attempting to provide perspectives on something like "the state of the art in TESOL today." How is one to address in a briéf paper the current interest in such areas as discourse analysis in second language teaching, the notional/functional syllabus, applications of insights from sociolinguistics to language teaching, the monitor model in second language acquisition, the emphasis on communicative activities and the acquisition of communicative competence in TESOL classrooms, and so forth? Of course one cannot do all of this in a single paper or in several papers.

It is also the case that there have been a number of state of the art publications in recent years. There are two relatively recent "state of the art in TESOL" reports by Paulston (1976, 1980), at least one TESOL-related "directions for the '80's" textbook in print, (Alatis, Altman, & Alatis, 1981), and a statement on the state of the art in second

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language teaching that goes beyond traditional audiolingual and cognitive-code approaches (Stevick, 1976). The challenge was to develop an alternative to simply reporting on portions of these comprehensive state of the art publications already in existence. I have tried to do this by developing a supplement to them, a way of looking at aspects of the state of the art through a set of categories gleaned from the literature to provide perspectives on TESOL today. In addition, a bit of history should prove helpful in obtaining such perspectives.

BACKGROUND

One outstanding characteristic of the state of the art in TESOL today upon which everyone seems to agree is the great diversity of activities and materials in the field. Perhaps more than any other language teaching field, we seem to enjoy experimenting with new approaches, methods, and techniques in our classrooms. Historically too this seems to have been the case. To quote a leading British methodologist commenting on the state of the art back in 1899: "Things are altogether unsettled regarding language teaching methods and materials"; he regarded this diversity as a good sign since it gave promise of "the survival of the fittest" (Sweet, 1899). Somewhat later in the 1920's, another leading TESOL methodologist suggested that "if we were to ask a hundred different language teachers to design what each considered an ideal EFL course or textbook, the results would be a hundred different courses, most differing from others in fundamental ways" (Palmer, 1921). Forty years later, in 1965, another leading methodologist listed

fifteen "most common" language teaching methods in use, including those methods labeled Direct, Natural, Psychological, Phonetic, Reading, Grammar, Translation, Grammar-Translation, Eclectic, Unit, Language Control, Mimicry-Memorization, Practice-Theory, Cognate, and Dual Language (Mackey, 1965). Although in a state of the art report just a few years ago it was suggested that "there is less uncertainty today regarding the state of the art in TESOL arising from the ferment in linguistics, psychology and pedagogy" (Paulston, 1975), others continue to see the diversity noted by Sweet back in 1899. Lado (1981), for example, notes that the challenge to the applied linguistics model of the '40s and '50s by the Chomskyian revolution in linguistics left a theoretical void which produced, as Lado put it, the "plethora of methodological proposals in the 1970's." We might add that the challenges to "standard" audio-lingual and cognitive-code language teaching methodologies by (among others) community language learning (Curran, 1976), by the silent way (Gattegno, 1976), and by applications of values clarification to second language teaching (Moskowitz, 1978) have all contributed to the diversity of second language teaching activities now current in TESOL classrooms. Along with this diversity have come competing claims for effectiveness of particular approaches and the validity of underlying principles. Rather than attempting to resolve these competing claims, probably impossible in any case, what I propose is to utilize from the literature and our own experience some categories through which we can examine a range of activities and ideas

current in TESOL. Utilizing these categories we can attempt to achieve perspectives for ourselves on those activities in a kind of mini state of the art of TESOL.

PERSPECTIVES

To illustrate the current diversity in TESOL to be sorted out we might begin with a list of prevalent activities and ideas. The list is almost openended but might include at least the following: audiolingual approach, counseling-learning approach, pattern practice, strip story, silent way, conversation circle, values clarification, Islamabad technique, sentence combining, language experience approach, cuisinaire rods, the human computer technique, and so forth. Of course we could go on and you could make up your own list of activities and ideas current in TESOL. In order to assist us in achieving perspectives on these activities and to assist us in making informed choices in what Altman (1981) has called "an era of curricular and pedagogical overchoice" in TESOL, it should help to examine the activities through some categories related to second language teaching. These categories can, I believe, allow us to begin to organize this wealth of diversity in TESOL and provide ourselves with a kind of mini view of the state of the art of TESOL. The set of categories we will discuss today is not exhaustive, but rather is intended to be suggestive of the sorts of categories which might prove helpful.

One set of categories worth recalling and utilizing in our search for perspectives is one which was first proposed by Anthony (1963). He suggested that we look at language

teaching activities and the principles underlying them in terms of a hierarchical framework involving the categories approach, method, and technique. Approach, he suggested, is axiomatic, representing a set of beliefs about the nature of learning and the nature of language. Approach states a point of view, a philosophy--something one believes but cannot necessarily prove. Applying this to our list of activities in second language teaching we would suggest that counseling-learning, silent way, transformational-cognitive, and audio-lingual are approaches rooted respectively in beliefs regarding the relative importance of humanism, a personal philosophy, cognitivism, and behaviorism in explaining facts about learning. These approaches are discussed in detail in Curran (1976), Gattegno (1976), Stevik (1971) and Lado (1964), and although there may be conflicting claims for each, there is nonetheless some reason for optimism regarding accommodation of activities from each. While approach is axiomatic in Anthony's hierarchy, the next concept--method--is procedural, and is consistent with the approach; it is an overall plan for teaching based on a given approach. Within this framework, community language learning is a method consistent with the counseling-learning approach. The use of the mimicry-memorization method is one generally associated with an audiolingual approach to second language teaching and behaviorist views of learning. Following method in Anthony's scheme of analysis is the most specific category, that of technique. A technique is implementational and is consistent with a method. It is what actually takes place in the classroom in terms of actions

and technologies to accomplish immediate objectives. From our list then we would include under technique the strip story, the Islamabad technique, the conversation circle usually associated with community language learning, and the use of cuisinaire rods in the silent way. The concepts of approach, method and technique then do provide us with one useful set of lenses through which to view the diversity of ideas current in second language teaching.

Another set of concepts, perhaps somewhat less clearly definable, is that of learner-centered activities and teacher-centered activities in the language classroom. It is a commonplace for us now to discuss learner-centered instruction, but Louis Kelly in his comprehensive book Twenty-Five Centuries of Language Teaching does not discuss the distinction at all. One is tempted to draw the conclusion that for 2,500 years from 500 B.C. to 1969 (the date of Kelly's book) teacher-centered activities dominated the second language classrooms of the world. This may still be a true picture of most classrooms in the world, yet in ESL in this country at any rate, the learner-centered classroom is receiving more attention, especially in approaches such as counseling-learning and its application in community language learning. So the notions of learner-centered and teacher-centered classes (though necessarily somewhat loosely defined) nonetheless are useful in helping us sort out characteristics of the items on our list. They prove helpful, for example, in attempting to answer questions such as which of the approaches, methods, and techniques currently available allow for one or the other emphasis in the classroom. The

"human computer" technique, for example, allows the learner to control pattern practice activities by indicating to the teacher which sentences he wants modelled for practice.

In making choices about activities which allow for non-traditional learner-centered activities in the classroom, we must of course keep in mind learner expectations regarding appropriate classroom roles for teachers and learners. Although one may adopt what Allwright (in Brumfit & Johnson, 1979) has labelled the "cheerful steamroller" attitude in overcoming student hesitations about unfamiliar learner-centered activities, we discovered in a recent Fulbright Program at Peking University that introduction of some non-traditional learner-centered techniques in traditional teacher-centered settings may result in only qualified success as measured by learner reactions to such techniques (Light, 1981).

Another set of concepts that we found useful in applying to our list was that of skill-getting and skill-using, two terms discussed at some length by Rivers and Temperley (1978). Skill-getting has traditionally involved teacher-directed activities such as repetition drills, pattern drills, and dialog recitation. Skill-using on the other hand involved student-initiated language exchanges for real communicative purposes. These concepts do help in making sense of our list, but like the others they have limitations. For example, one might assume that the skill-getting takes place primarily in a teacher-centered atmosphere, while skill-using happens some time later, mainly in a student-centered atmosphere with student-initiated language use. However, this is a somewhat

oversimplified view, as we discover when we examine our list through these two lenses. For example, in the conversation circle technique, which involves student-initiated but teacher-assisted language use, skill-getting and skill-using are closely intertwined. In this technique the student uses the target language immediately for real communication, but skill-getting takes place almost simultaneously as the teacher assists by modelling the language the student has chosen. Thus this student-centered conversation circle technique allows for both skill-getting and skill-using to proceed hand in hand.

We used the phrase "real communicative purposes" above. If there is one current trend in second language teaching upon which virtually all TESOL specialists appear to agree it is the need for learners to use English for "real communication" both in the classroom and outside it. It may be labelled "real" (as distinguished from "realistic") language use (Stevick, 1971), it may be language used to discuss "real reality" as distinguished from "simulated reality" (Taylor, 1982) or it may be "communicative" activities as distinguished from mechanical or meaningful activities (Paulston & Bruder, 1976), but all agree it is crucial to allowing learners to develop their second language proficiency. A useful set of categories for putting "communicative" activities into perspective was developed by Paulston and Bruder (1976) who suggest a distinction among mechanical, meaningful and communicative activities. Mechanical activities or drills are those which can be done by students without necessarily understanding the language they are using in the drill. Included here are repetition drills and your

everyday garden variety substitution drills using verbal cues. Students may "successfully" participate in these drills without understanding them. Meaningful drills on the other hand are those requiring at least partial understanding in order to successfully do the drills, as when visual cues are used requiring the student to link language with pictures or realia during the drills. Communicative activities as defined by Paulston and Bruder, require students to use the target language to exchange new information, including stating facts, predictions, opinions, and so forth; the sort of things we normally use language for. Paying attention to this set of categories enables us to focus on the relative importance of these types of activities in a given ESOL classroom or lesson. Some lesson models call for a relatively minor role for communicative activities. Paulston and Bruder's (1976) eight-step model for a grammar lesson, for example, includes a communicative activity as the eighth and last step, following such traditional steps as "presenting the dialog," "asking comprehension questions," "giving grammatical explanations" and doing mechanical and then meaningful drills.

Others have called for a reversal of this practice-first and communicate-later format. It has been suggested that an ESOL program "should be based on content and real issues" (Taylor, 1982); that we should "adopt a communicative orientation" to the teaching of ESOL (Widdowson, 1978) and that we should be "reorienting language teaching towards communication, not just because the eventual aim is communication but because communication practice can be expected to develop linguistic

skills" (Allwright in Brumfit & Johnson, 1979). But whatever part we choose to have communicative activities play in our classrooms, I believe the three-way distinction among mechanical, meaningful and communicative activities is still a useful one for us to consider as we examine our teaching.

Related to this distinction and to increased interest in communicative use of language in the classroom are the concepts of real and realistic use of language suggested by Stevick (1971) and Taylor's (1982) analogous use of the terms "simulated reality" and "real reality." "Realistic" language use or "simulated reality" involves such classroom activities as discussion of pictured situations, role plays, and many traditional audio-lingual activities. "Real" language use or "real reality" in the classroom on the other hand involves focus on discussion of genuine issues and real-life situations, and includes opportunities for students to do such things as describe events, express opinions, or accomplish specific tasks. Support for this emphasis upon communication has come not only from informed opinion in the literature but also from an extensive review of the research on second language learning. Carroll (1974), after reviewing some one hundred thirty studies of second language learning and teaching concluded among other things that instruction should be "as meaningful as possible" and should "come alive in meaningful communication situations" (p. 143). Given this current well-reasoned emphasis on communication in the classroom I believe this distinction between real and realistic, or simulated reality and real reality, by whatever label, is a helpful one to add to our set of categories for

sorting out language classroom activities. Providing for a focus on real language use are such activities in our initial list as the conversation circle, values clarification activities, and the exotic-sounding Islamabad technique, actually a student-originated, teacher-directed activity using cuisinaire rods in a counseling-learning atmosphere first discussed by Stevick (1980). [In the Islamabad technique a student describes a city or other place no one else in the class has ever seen, representing each sentence with a cuisinaire rod. The teacher then retells the description, asking the student for help where needed. The rest of the class watches and listens, the concreteness of the rods providing a visual focus for their concentration and their imagination. The teacher's retelling serves to allow the learners to hear the description again in a natural, native voice. Other students then take turns pointing to the rods and telling things they remember from the account. Finally, the other students ask the originator questions about the city or other place he has described. As Stevick (1980) notes, this technique promotes communication and allows people "to do something together." The originator has contributed "real" facts; the teacher and other students have contributed ignorance of and interest in the facts; the teacher has contributed guidance, and whatever words the originator needed. The language that comes out of this technique (as with language coming out of other techniques) can be fed into many other activities. It can be recorded on tape, transcribed by students or teacher, written on a handout for discussion at the next class session,

used as material for dictation, used as the basis for grammatical exercises, and so forth.] So this is one of the several techniques on our list which allows for a focus on communication, may be considered learner-centered, and reverses the traditional lesson format of practice first, communicate later.

Another helpful distinction to consider in trying to organize diversity is that between language use in teaching settings and language use in non-teaching settings. As suggested by Fanselow (1978, and forthcoming) the distinction encourages us to describe and compare the patterns of communication in the two settings and to determine the extent to which the purposes for which we have students use language in the classroom are congruent with purposes for which they will use language outside of the classroom. Utilizing a coding system to classify purposes (structuring, soliciting, reacting and responding) and sources (teacher or student) in the classroom setting and in other settings, Fanselow found that there was indeed incongruence between purposes used in the two types of settings. (Soliciting and responding accounted for two-thirds of the communications in teaching settings while reacting accounted for two-thirds of the communication in non-teaching settings). Faneslow suggested several activities which help to restore congruity between in-class and out-of-class purposes for language use, and also maintain the focus on communication we have been discussing as a major trend in TESOL. His suggestions include providing an opportunity for students to teach a class about some topic on which they are informed;

having students interviewing other students to elicit opinions about a relevant topic; communicating in small groups to accomplsih some assigned task; having students assume the role of observer and reporter of some activity in or outside of the class. As with other techniques, follow-up activities involving recording and further use of student's language generated in these activities would allow communication to remain the initial focus of the lesson with various types of practice activities introduced later. Further elaboration upon activities for second language learners in non-teaching settings is provided by Lo Castro and Laporte (1981) who discuss "non-classroom learning environments" as opportunities for changing traditional TESOL interaction patterns. Community-based tasks such as obtaining information about specific merchandise and prices in a particular store, locating a particular place by asking questions in the target community, and taking field trips to student-suggested areas of interest with specific pre- and post-trip language activities are all suggested as complementary to a regular ESL classroom.

Another set of categories through which we can view language teaching activities has been discussed by Stevick (1971). Developed primarily as a set of "working assumptions" about effective language teaching materials they are still helpful in our search for perspectives on TESOL. Briefly, these categories are as follows:

Usability which suggests that features learned may be used immediately by learners for their own purposes for communication.

Each new word and new grammatical feature should be used, either really or realistically, as early as possible.

The next category is organization implying there must be order in the introduction of classroom activities and some way of organizing classroom procedures.

Next is responsiveness which suggests that individuals and groups vary in the lexical content they can make immediate use of, in the approaches they will accept, and in the methods appropriate for them. "Responsiveness" is close to "relevance."

Responsibility implies that other things being equal, a program will be more effective if students and instructors feel they have some control over both content and method.

Pluralism, the final category, suggests that no one format and no one system of teaching can be sufficient for one group of students or even one student. Procedures and systems and approaches supplement rather than supersede one another.

Although designed specifically for application to lessons and materials with more traditional formats, Stevick's five categories nonetheless prove helpful when applied to a non-traditional method such as Community Language Learning. To illustrate: CLL measures up very well when the first category of usability is considered (ie "people learn features of a language best if they can use those features immediately for their own purposes"). The use of language in many CLL activities, particularly the conversation circle, is by its very nature "real", and "usable." The language used in the classroom in this case consists of the

productions initiated by the learners themselves and focus is on the content not the form of language.

Organization, the second of Stevick's categories, is also evident in CLL, although it is not organization in such traditional ways as the graded presentation of grammatical categories. Although the teacher organizes activities, students retain initiative in such techniques as the conversation circle.

Responsiveness of topics and techniques is also found in the conversation circle and other CLL techniques, since in many of these activities it is the learners who choose topics for discussion.

Responsibility suggests that "other things being equal, a lesson or program will be more effective if students and instructors feel they have some control over both content and methods". CLL scores well here too since it promotes student input in determining the content and means to learning through feedback sessions and initial student determination of topics to discuss in a technique such as the Conversation Circle.

Pluralism, allowing for variety in formats and techniques is also inherent in CLL. Even such traditional activities as pattern practice may appear in CLL classrooms.

So this set of categories developed by Stevick does help us in obtaining some additional perspectives on TESOL materials and activities.

Another set of categories with which we can consider the state of the art in TESOL involves the distinction between formal and

informal linguistic environments. As distinguished by Krashen (1976, 1982) formal, or artificial linguistic environments are found for the most part in the classroom and are characterized by formal presentation of linguistic rules and error correction and/or error detection and are sources of "comprehensible input" for the learner. Informal linguistic environments on the other hand are characterized by absence of rule presentation and error feedback and may not be sources of comprehensible input. Both environments are seen as contributing to second language proficiency, but in different ways. Rules from the formal linguistic environment can contribute to "conscious linguistic knowledge" which according to Krashen acts as a "monitor" under certain conditions to alter a learner's language production. The informal linguistic environment may be of two types. The "exposure" type is non-intensive and does not involve the learner directly in interaction. For example, watching a play, listening to a lecture or to the radio would qualify as informal "exposure" type environments. The "intake" type informal environment on the other hand is intensive, involves the learner directly, and would include most activities discussed above under communicative activities. It is Krashen's view that the ESOL classroom can serve as both an intake informal linguistic environment and as a formal linguistic environment and that both can contribute to learner proficiency in English. Activities from our list such as the conversation circle would presumably qualify as an intake informal environment, while grammatical explanations would constitute a formal linguistic environment.

A final set of categories which helps us in viewing the state of the art is one with which you are all familiar, but I mention

it because of its current importance in TESOL methods and materials. The distinction between linguistic competence and communicative competence is discussed at some length by Hymes (1966) in Brumfit and Johnson (1979), but briefly, linguistic competence refers to the ability to produce and understand language forms while communicative competence refers to the ability to use these forms appropriately in a variety of settings. The latter requires a knowledge of the social rules for language use and is undoubtedly a goal in most TESOL classrooms in the U.S. Among the classroom activities assisting students in achieving communicative competence are those which prepare students for community-based tasks, such as those discussed above, by making them aware of rules of appropriateness for using language suited to the particular task(s) at hand. In addition, an article by Trish Delamere in a recent issue of Gulf Area TESOL Newsletter (1, 6, Fall 1981) suggests the effectiveness of a national/functional syllabus in contributing to communicative competence in ESOL learners. In a few minutes I plan to follow John Fanselow's advice and break some of those rules he discusses by sharing with you a handout which will illustrate very nicely the importance of the linguistic competence/communicative competence concept to all of us, including dictionary makers.

In summarizing, it is fair to conclude that the state of the art in TESOL today is characterized by considerable diversity in philosophies, activities and materials. It seems this diversity has been with us for a long time; indications are that it will continue to be with us, and most would agree, I believe, that this is a healthy state of affairs. The categories discussed

above should help us to make sense of this diversity, and to achieve some perspective on the state of the art in TESOL in our own classrooms as well as in the world of the '80s. Thank you.

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